

Guard Up Summer Camps Moves to Westford East Boston Camps

Guard Up! Inc, a Burlington MA based company, has been awarded a 5 year contract by the Westford Conservation Commission to occupy and run their summer camps out of Westford's East Boston Camps starting this summer. Guard Up runs three versions of its two summer camps: Wizards & Warriors Camp and NERF Zombie Camp. The three versions are the Day Camp, based out of its facility in Burlington; the Quest Camp, an extended Day Camp for ages 10 and up based out of the new Westford East Boston Camps (EBC) location; and the Overnight Camp for ages 10 and up, which is also run out of the Westford EBC location.

"We are very excited about the move from Charlton (Massachusetts) to Westford," says Meghan Gardner, founder of Guard Up. "Personally speaking, I have been in love with EBC for about 10 years... since I first attended events at the camp when my children were young. My husband and I have taken our children to walk the paths and enjoy the gorgeous setting many times. The camp is breathtakingly beautiful. I feel honored that our camp was selected and I am thrilled with the opportunity for our company to play a role in preserving this treasured land and camp."

Guard Up has been working closely with the Westford Conservation Commission and the Health Department to make sure that the camp is brought up to code before the start of this summer camp season. "The town of Westford has gone out of their way to make us feel welcome. The Health Department and the Conservation Commission continue to provide us with the connections and information we need to bring the camp to code and to meet our objectives," says Gardner. "The Westford Friends of East Boston Camps has been very instrumental in upgrading the camp - we could not have done this without them. The Westford Recreation Department has helped us with their extensive knowledge of operating programs out of this camp as well."

Bill Turner, the Resource Planner for the Westford Conservation Commission says the lease of East Boston Camps is in line with the commission's objectives for the camp which were established in 2005 when the Town of Westford purchased it from the Hyams Foundation. "The Conservation Commission issued a Request for Proposals from camp operators for lease of the property for a summer camp operation, and selected Guard Up, Inc. because it had the most responsive proposal," explains Turner. "The lease agreement calls for Guard Up to provide both cash payments as well as improvements to the camp building to bring them up to code requirements. This will go a long way towards helping make the camp available for license for other groups and functions so as to generate yet more income and help meet the Master Plan goal of reducing the cost to the taxpayer of maintaining the property."

Since the East Boston Camps is often an area used by local residents, the Conservation Commission and Guard Up are working on plans to accommodate both the campers and residents in a manner that protects the interests of both. "In order to provide for the safety and security of participating children, the Guard Up program will have exclusive use of that portion of the property located around the main camp area known as the 'Boys

Camp’,” says Turner. “While residents will not be able to enter the camp area while it is in session, they will be able to continue to walk up the roadway to this area and then will be able to continue along a new bypass trail that will run out along the crest of the slope above Keyes Brook, eventually reconnecting to the main trail to the north of the camp by the basketball court. Signs showing the restricted area and location of the bypass trail will be posted at the EBC kiosk and online. Anyone having questions can email me at bturner@westfordma.gov or call at 978-692-5524.”

The camps run by Guard Up are unique, to say the least.

At the Wizards & Warriors camp, campers enter an imaginary realm and embark on an unforgettable adventure, taking up foam swords and crossbows to mount a battle for good versus evil against an assortment of fantasy villains. Nerf Zombie Camp, a new concept at Guard Up, lets defenders take up NERF blasters against zombies in a post-apocalyptic wilderness. These camps offer the types of adventure loved by families through the magic of books, film or video games. However, here they take place in a real, physically challenging, and socially interactive environment.

This novel concept of a live, interactive, and educational story for young heroes has been perfected at Guard Up over the past decade. The camp has enlisted the help of a number of youth instructors, actors and game developers to devise a custom Live Role Playing Game, and has hired professional archaeologists, historians, and teachers to help campers learn about history, literature, mythology, biology, and environmental conservation. Students also develop an understanding of strategy, teamwork, problem solving, and other important life skills in a highly entertaining and creative environment.

“We have two mottos at all of our Camps. One guides our operational methods, and the other guides our creative process,” explains Gardner. “Our first and most important motto is *Safe, Fun, and Educational*. These are our three Rules of Operation. Every adventure, activity, and interaction that our campers experience must incorporate these three rules, in order of priority. The second motto is *Honor, Compassion, and Courage*. These are the three attributes we want our campers to explore as they define the term *Hero*. ”

Some of the creative costuming and activities could cause alarm among hikers, dog owners, and their pets who normally walk the property. Since dogs have a tendency to want to be involved in children’s activities and some children are afraid of dogs, the best action is prevention. “The camps will provide a wonderful backdrop for the children participating in the program,” says Turner. “They will be venturing out with their counselors from the main camp area onto the rest of the property, and if you are a regular hiker don’t be surprised if, in the course of your walks, you come across groups of colorfully costumed characters on an important quest. Dog walkers must expect such encounters and we can’t emphasize too strongly how important it is that to assure everyone’s safety, dogs must be kept on a leash while on the property. This is imperative to guarantee that the dogs are under control, particularly during the summer season when there will be so many active children present.”

Enrollment for the camps has been strong considering the current economy. Adam Rodgers, the Camp Director attributes this to the unique nature of the camps. "Campers travel from as far away as Australia, Chile, Switzerland, England and other countries to attend the Guard Up camps because there is nothing quite like them anywhere else" says Rodgers. "Our international campers find out about us through our website or Facebook and we make arrangements to pick them up at the Boston Logan Airport".

This year, Guard Up is giving away a record number of scholarships for low income families to their summer camp. Christine Yablonski, Assistant Camp Director and Westford resident, is spreading the word about the financial assistance program. "We still have scholarships left for those who wish to apply" says Yablonski. "We have donated 20% of our camp profits to the scholarship program and all low income families have to do is fill out the application for consideration. We even provide transportation from some of the local communities with our bus pickup service."

Both Turner and Peter Mahler, Treasurer of the Westford Friends of East Boston Camps, support the objective to provide more camp scholarships for families in need. "The Westford Friends of East Boston Camps are excited that the long tradition of overnight camping will return this year with Guard Up operating a summer program at the site," says Mahler. "This, along with Guard Up's camp scholarship program for underprivileged children, helps to fulfill not only our mission of restoring the camps but also the goals of the Town's master plan for the camp property."

"The Commission is particularly pleased at the scholarships Guard Up is offering, which is directly in line with the Master Plan goal to continue summer camp programs including children of low income families," says Turner.

Incorporated in 1999, Guard Up's novel concept has attracted much attention. However, according to the company, it is the camp's high standard of instructor training and its emphasis on sports and creative games as vehicles for positive personal growth that has made it a success. For Gardner, what motivates the staff is simple: It is the look on the face of a child as they see imaginary worlds brought to life. It is the thrill Guard Up campers experience being heroes in a real life adventure that they had only ever dreamed about before.

Visit www.guardup.com or call 781-270-4800 for more information about Guard Up camps and scholarships.